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# AVICULTURAL MAGAZINE

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## BREEDING THE WHITE-COLLARED YUHINA

by P. Burden

The White-collared Yuhina *Yuhina diademata* is a small passerine measuring about 6in (15cm) long. It comes from south-west and south China, north Vietnam and north-east Burma (Howard and Moore, 1980). There is a coloured illustration of it on plate 23 of de Schauensee's *The Birds of China* (1984). Its most distinctive feature is its white collar. Many people mistakenly call this species the White-naped Yuhina but the White-naped Yuhina is *Y. bakeri*, which comes from the eastern Himalayas and Assam (Howard and Moore, 1980). My pair are larger than most and are probably the largest of all the yuhinas. As I know my pair so well, I can sex them, even though males and females look alike.

I bought the birds in December 1995 from a trade stand at the National Exhibition of Cage and Aviary Birds. They were put in an aviary measuring 9ft x 6ft x 7ft high (approx. 2.7m x 1.8m x 2.1m high) attached to an indoor flight 3ft x 9ft x 7ft high (approx. 1m x 2.7m x 2.1m high) in my garage, in which they like to feed on apple pushed through the wire. They also have other fruits according to the season and Vega Lage universal insectivorous mixture. They especially enjoy elderberries. The aviary is thickly planted and has the top and both ends covered with perspex. The left side has a panel attached so that neighbours cannot look in and to protect the birds from cats. Other occupants of the aviary have included Golden-breasted Waxbills *Amandava subflava* (which have bred), Red-billed Firefinches *Lagonosticta senegala*, Red-cheeked Cordon-bleus *Uraeginthus bengalus* and a male rosefinch *Carpodacus* sp. They like to hawk insects and catch a lot of flies. Mealworms are offered only when they are breeding.

They nested 5ft (approx. 1.5m) above the aviary floor in a conifer bush, having also had the choice of privet bushes and bamboo. The cup-shaped nest consisted of hay, moss and feathers. The nest could easily be seen as could the sitting female which undertook perhaps seventy-five percent of the incubation.

The same place was used in 1996, 1997 and 1998, with two eggs being

laid each time, but it was not until 1998 that they were successful. I noticed on July 1st that the female was sitting tight. I noticed there were egg shells in the flight on July 16th and saw the head of a chick on July 22nd. Both young fledged on July 28th after I had seen them on the edge of the nest the previous day. They were paler, greyer, versions of their parents.

I separated them from their parents in October and exhibited them on two occasions, both times winning the award for best current year owner bred foreign bird. The parents have also been successful on the show bench and won numerous awards either shown as a pair or when exhibited individually. They can be aggressive to other small birds in the aviary but generally only when breeding. They appear to be hardy, easy to manage and make an ideal softbill for beginners.

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## THREE MONTHS - THREE CONTINENTS

by Charlie Romer

As 1999 drew to a close, I had a particularly good reason for looking forward to the new Millennium. I thoroughly enjoy my work as a member of Melbourne Zoo's bird department and as the 1999-2000 breeding season neared its end there were a number of reasons for quiet satisfaction. Among our breeding successes were Superb Blue Wren *Malurus cyaneus*, Satin Bowerbird *Ptilonorhynchus violaceus*, Grey Shrike-Thrush *Colluricincla harmonica*, Yellow-backed Chattering Lory *Lorius garrulus flavopalliatu*s, King Parrot *Alisterus scapularis*, Purple-crowned Lorikeet *Glossopsitta porphyrocephala*, Red-tailed Black Cockatoo *Calyptorhynchus magnificus*, Black-breasted Button-Quail *Turnix melanogaster*, Blue-billed Duck *Oxyura australis*, Australian Pelican *Pelecanus conspicillatus* and Brolga *Grus rubicundus*. Because of import restrictions the zoo's bird collection consists mainly of indigenous species with just a few exotics such as Blue & Gold Macaw *Ara ararauna*, Sun Conure *Aratinga solstitialis*, Nanday Conure *Nandayus nenday*, Grey Parrot *Psittacus erithacus*, Dusky Lory *Pseudeos fuscata*, Red Lory *Eos bornea*, Mandarin Duck *Aix galericulata* and Luzon Bleeding Heart *Gallicolumba luzonica*.

In addition to the Red-tailed Black Cockatoo, Black-breasted Button-Quail and Brolga, other rare or studbook species in the collection include Golden-shouldered Parrot *Psephotus chrysopterygius*, Sooty Owl *Tyto tenebricosa*, Australian Bustard *Choriotis australis* and Freckled Duck *Stictonetta naevosa*. Also of interest is a colony of Little Penguins *Eudyptula minor* which has been producing chicks regularly for more than 30 years.

In mid-1999, I applied for, and was subsequently awarded, a zoo-based scholarship which would enable me to visit macaw habitat in southern Peru and spend time at Loro Parque, Tenerife, to study the latest husbandry and bird management techniques which will be of considerable value at Melbourne Zoo where the bird department is undergoing considerable change, with staff development a key element. In February I embarked on the first leg of my journey - destination Cusco. That was the easy bit! I arrived during the rainy season and the grass landing strip which was my interim destination was too muddy for even the most intrepid aviator to attempt a landing. So I spent a frustrating five days kicking my heels and hoping each morning for news that conditions at the strip had improved. But if you are destined to be marooned somewhere in Peru, Cusco is a by no means boring location. It is an interesting place, dominated by Spanish colonial architecture built on visible foundations laid down by the Incas. It seemed to be populated by almost equal numbers of locals and tourists,

including many ubiquitous backpackers. A considerable volume of cars on its roads and streets means a steadily increasing pollution problem. But above all it is a mecca for sightseers. There are temples, Inca ruins, craft markets - and of course the celebrated Inca ruins at Machu Picchu, close enough for a day trip courtesy of Peru Rail.

Eventually, conditions at the landing strip improved sufficiently for me to board a light aircraft for the 45 minute flight. At the strip, Indian guides were waiting to take me on the next stage, a 2½ hour journey by motorised canoe along the Madre de Dios River to the base at Rio Blanco where I was to spend the next seven weeks assisting Odette Doust, a Dutch veterinarian, and her local research assistants. The project was in two phases; the first of which involved monitoring the growth rates and development of four endemic macaw species - Scarlet *Ara macao*, Green-winged *A. chloroptera*, Blue & Gold and Severe *A. severa*. Local Indians, whose detailed knowledge of the locality, not to mention their tree-climbing expertise which was put to good use retrieving young macaws from nests located considerable distances above the ground. In general, Scarlet and Severe Macaws preferred local, dead palm trees that rot from the top. When a section breaks-off it usually leaves an open cavity in which the birds nest. Sites in such locations presented particular dangers for the climbers who often had to negotiate areas of decayed wood up to 40ft (approx. 12m) above the ground. On the other hand, Green-winged Macaws preferred solid and very tall trees in which broken branches formed nesting cavities. Retrieval of nestlings from this environment posed additional problems as biting insects constantly swarmed round the climbers' bodies, especially, it seemed, their heads, making both ascents and descents particularly difficult and dangerous.

Retrieved birds were lowered to the ground in plastic baskets where blood samples, beak and cloacal swabs were taken, and they were weighed before being returned to the nest. It was a routine which took place approximately once a week until the birds fledged. The study site, on an area of privately owned land, was approximately 20sq. km. (approx. 8sq miles) in area.

The second phase involved retrieval of nestling Scarlet and Severe Macaws. These nests were located in trees close to the river which was in flood at the time. Rapidly rising water levels were obviously destined to destroy the entire site and nestlings were therefore taken for rearing. The young birds ranged in age from three to eight weeks old. They were moved to an Indian camp and housed in a typical hut of timber and palm leaf construction, supplemented with fly wire. They were raised in isolation by Odette Doust in order to minimise imprinting. The birds were fed a commercial hand-rearing formula supplemented with local fruits, collected by the Indians. These were typical of fruits which formed part of the diet of

wild birds and were scattered on the floor of the holding facility. Initially, brooding boxes were used but these were rendered obsolete as the youngsters became more wary and started to explore their environment. It was not long before they started to use perches fixed at various heights; they fledged when about three to four months old. The process was accelerated by use of a diet probably more varied and nutritious than they would have received in the wild.

The base was surrounded by pristine rainforest and wildlife was plentiful. Among the more significant mammal species were South American Tapir *Tapirus terrestris*, Jaguar *Panthera onca*, Giant Otter *Pteronura brasiliensis* and a variety of primates including howler *Alouatta* spp., spider *Ateles* spp. and Squirrel Monkeys *Saimiri sciureus*, and various tamarins *Saguinus* spp. In addition to previously mentioned macaw species, local avifauna included Harpy Eagle *Harpia harpyja*, King Vulture *Sarcoramphus papa*, Ornate Hawk Eagle *Spizaetus ornatus*, various trogons *Trogon* spp., quetzal *Pharomacrus* spp., jacamars *Brachygalba* spp., cotingas *Cotinga* spp., White-winged Trumpeter *Psophia leucoptera*, Spix's Guan *Penelope jacquacu*, Anhinga *Anhinga anhinga*, Hoatzin *Opisthocomus hoazin* and a vast array of hummingbirds and various passerine species.

The prevailing climate was hot and oppressive - 'sticky' is probably the most apt word to describe it. Food deteriorated rapidly as a result of mould and was also lacking in variety. Having said that, how much better off we must have been compared to those who explored the area in a bygone era. The local tributary, inhabited as it was by many species of catfish, piranhas and a few Black Caiman *Melanosuchus niger*, still provided water for drinking and bathing as well as being our highway. The main rivers were black and muddy. Only the odd one was clear and inviting.

The final phase of the macaw project involved construction of an 80ft (approx. 24m) high feeding platform from which the artificially raised juveniles could feed, climb and generally integrate with non-captives of the same species before eventually moving back into the wild. So far as we know, this process was successful, although difficult to evaluate since first-year pressures such as lack of food in the dry season would present a major test of their survivability. There was also the question of predation of inexperienced birds by Harpy Eagle and other large raptors. It was regarded as a valuable training exercise to be utilised for more endangered macaw species. Future projects may include satellite telemetry to help monitor macaw populations, although at US\$5,000 (approx £3,000) per bird it is a high cost exercise. This technology was developed in the USA by NASA and is already in use in a project involving Harpy Eagles.

The area in which I was located in southern Peru's Madre de Dios region is adjacent to Manu National Park. Habitat ranges from tropical lowland

forest into higher elevations and cloud forest retains. There was little or no evidence of poaching and the hope is that experience gained here can be used to advantage with more conservation-needy species such as the Hyacinth *Anodorhynchus hyacinthinus* and Blue-throated Macaw *A. glaucogularis*.

After two months in the rainforest, and still amazed by the whole Amazonian experience, I left for Tenerife in the Canary Islands where I was to spend a few weeks at Loro Parque, the world's biggest collection of parrots with more than 300 species and subspecies. My role there was to assist and observe general husbandry and day-to-day happenings.

In the main visitors' area at the park more than 600 birds are exhibited in pairs. A separate breeding complex is located at La Vera approximately 2 km (1¼ miles) away, where 2,600 birds are housed in a state-of-the-art facility. More than 800 young are reared each season and this number is expected to increase as the facility expands.

Among endangered species in the collection are Spix's Macaw *Cyanopsitta spixii*, Blue-throated Macaw, Palm Cockatoo *Probosciger aterrimus*, rare island Amazons and lorikeets to name but a few. The emphasis on conservation is immense and substantial sums of money are contributed to projects involving such species as Red and Blue Lory *Eos histrio*, Moluccan Cockatoo *Cacatua moluccensis*, Red-vented Cockatoo *C. haematuropygia* and Yellow-eared Conure *Ognorhynchus icterotis*.

The Mediterranean climate with its mild winters is obviously excellent for bird-keeping and a further plus is the ready availability of excellent local produce. There is a significant commitment to staff development at the park. A highlight every four years is the World Parrot Convention which brings together leading veterinarians, conservationists, researchers and other specialists from around the world. Papers and findings are shared during this important gathering. During my short stay at Loro Parque I learned an enormous amount about techniques ranging from general husbandry to display. Staff were helpful and courteous, and the emphasis on conservation was inspiring. At Melbourne Zoo we aim to continue and develop this new relationship in the future.

My final destination was England where I spent a short while with my family and had a look at one or two collections. Chester Zoo, where I had worked before going to Australia, was inevitably top of my visiting list. As usual it was impossible not to be impressed by the collection there - especially some of the species not available 'Down Under', including Red Bird of Paradise *Paradisaea rubra*, St Lucia Amazon *Amazona versicolor*, a splendid collection of hornbills, Violaceous Touraco *Musophaga violacea*, Mauritius Kestrel *Falco punctatus*, Congo Peafowl *Afropavo congensis* and Great Grey Owl *Strix nebulosa*.

Among the more significant mammal species were Black Rhinoceros *Diceros bicornis*, a nice social herd of Asiatic Elephant *Elephas maximus*,

in a spacious and well designed indoor/outdoor exhibit - and obviously doing well with one 18-months old calf and two pregnant cows. Philippine Spotted Deer *Cervus alfredi*, Babirusa *Babirusa babyrussa*, Rodrigues Fruit Bat *Pteropus rodricensis*, Buffy-headed Capuchin *Cebus xanthosternos* and Europe's largest Chimpanzee *Pan troglodytes* colony of some 30 animals were all impressive.

London Zoo was another must and here it was the small mammal collection which took my eye for it also includes many choice species not represented in Australian zoos including Silvery Marmoset *Callithrix argentata*, Golden-headed Lion Tamarin *Leontopithecus chrysomelas*, Goeldi's Monkey *Callimico goeldi* and Aye-Aye *Daubentonia madagascariensis*. Two other impressive - but very different - exhibits were Okapi *Okapia johnstoni* and Hyacinth Macaw.

Shortly afterwards I returned to a Melbourne winter and resumed my work at the zoo where I will share details of my experience with colleagues and hopefully help implement some of the new ideas I brought back from my travels. I am extremely grateful and privileged that Melbourne Zoo decided to facilitate the trip. To anyone with even the remotest interest in birds and who has the opportunity to visit either Loro Parque or South America's remaining rainforests I have just one recommendation: seize the opportunity with both hands and hold tight to it. Either or both will provide an unforgettable experience.

### Acknowledgements

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## HOW I CAME TO KEEP MOUSEBIRDS

by Kara Black

I guess I was under the impression that the only pet birds available were parrots. If you went to the bird shows in the Nashville area, you could easily see how I came to that conclusion. There was a sprinkling of canaries and budgerigars, a dusting of finches, and a full-blown infestation of larger squawking birds that frankly overwhelmed this former finch fanatic. Oh sure, I had the obligatory Cockatiel *Nymphicus hollandicus* back in my college days, but had since in my early thirties moved onto finches, opting for a quieter and less demanding exchange between pet and owner.

One day online I stumbled upon an article about mousebirds. How simply delicious, here was a creature with all the charm, affection and personality of my Cockatiel, if not more, and none of the noise: a marketing coup if ever there was one. I rejoiced for every neglected Cockatiel which along with its cage, had been relegated to a dark closet or an outside location somewhere to scream well out of its owner's earshot.

Going through a divorce has a way of simplifying one's life, and mine was no exception. I was eager to get back to the basics of avian husbandry. Breeding finches had evolved from a delight into a burden. I had become more concerned with producing chicks than marvelling at their creation. I was eager to return to the peaceful days in which hours were spent just watching my birds, much to the neglect of the rest of my life (and I wonder why my marriage did not work!). When I located a bird broker willing to trade several Pekin Robins *Leiothrix lutea* and a pair of Speckled Mousebirds *Colius striatus* for all of my Owl (Double-barred or Bicheno) Finches *Poephila bichenovii*, I was ecstatic.

I had read that mousebirds are superficially unremarkable in appearance and named more for the manner in which they creep and crawl than the way they look. Eleven to 14in (28cm-35.5cm) long, with long, stiff tail feathers which account for two-thirds of their total length, mousebirds are sexually monomorphic (the sexes do not differ in appearance). The six species include the Red-faced *C. indicus*, Red-backed *C. castanotus* and Blue-naped *C. macroura*, but I was obtaining the more common Speckled species.

Mousebirds, or colies, are considered prolific breeders, and I had high expectations. Often I observed them either courting or fighting. The male would delicately feed the female or she would feverishly chase him around the aviary, once actually drawing blood. On other occasions the male would hop methodically several times next to the female, which would then allow him to mount her. They preferred a cup-shaped nest in a low-growing shrub. She begun the 18 day incubation period after the first egg was laid. Despite

their aggressive courtship and subsequent mating, my mousebirds produced only two clutches of two eggs, both of which were infertile. When I placed the mousebirds in the quarantine cage, they eagerly scrambled for the mashed fruit that I had prepared for them. Unlike my finches, the mousebirds actually held their food while chewing it, in a manner reminiscent of my Uncle Arnie after he had taken out his dentures for their nightly soak.



Malcolm Ellis

**Speckled Mousebird**

They absolutely loved banana, and almost anything else soft or cooked came a strong second. According to Martin Vince in his must-have book *Softbills* (Hancock House Publishers Ltd), they are frugivores that do well on a diet similar to the fruit based omnivores, but require a lower protein intake. He recommends a diet consisting of 55% fruit, 30% softbill pellets, 10% hard-boiled egg and 5% vegetables and greens. Due to their penchant for vegetation and soft fruits, mousebirds are considered pests in parts of Africa, and fruit farmers and gardeners do not look fondly upon them. I can certainly empathize with these sentiments, as my pair made short order of a hanging fern and totally ravished a ficus tree by summer's end.

When I moved to my new 'single again' home, I made sure I had enough money to build my lifelong dream of an outside aviary. A triangular-shaped structure attached to one corner of my deck, it was made using 2in x 2in (5cm x 5cm) pressure treated timber and 1/4in (6mm) vinegar-washed, galvanized wire mesh. It measured 14ft (approx. 4.2m) on its longest side

and was 9ft (approx. 2.7m) high. I added numerous plants, real and artificial, and several perches using branches placed between the taut wires. One-third of the structure butted up against my house where there was a 2ft (61cm) roof overhang and a vinyl side wall. I used a bug-zapper during the summer months to provide an endless supply of insects. Ignored for the most part by the mousebirds, the assortment of moths was relished by the Pekin Robins. I made a small pond from the upturned top of a rubber garbage can that balanced on a large plastic plant lid. An old recirculating pump made a delightful bubbling sound that, when turned on, encouraged all except the mousebirds to take a bath. They never bathed in water and certainly did not drink it, but I learned later that they were taking extravagant dust baths in the brightly coloured softbill pellets that I had mistakenly believed I was providing strictly for their nourishment.

My mousebirds loved the aviary and I would hear them making their cute little squeaks and 'giggles'. They were though rarely visible in their new accommodation. Whenever I walked by the aviary they would scurry to the top corner, where they would remain motionless until I left. Otherwise, most of their time was spent lounging in the hanging fern, perching vertically on the wire or scuttling rapidly about the floor. If you saw the film *Alien*, you may remember how after the embryo sprang from one of the crewmember's chest, it scurried across the floor. My mousebirds seemed to remind me of that image. At night, mousebirds prefer sleep in groups, and my pair was often found clinging torpidly together in tête-a-tête fashion appearing much like a Rorschach inkblot. In an attempt to conserve energy, mousebirds allow their body temperature to drop during the night. As a result, the early mornings would often reveal them fluffed-up in the first sun kissed corner of the aviary, much like the tumble-dried Pink Panther cartoon character that I used to love as a child.

By November, the temperature dropped occasionally into the 30s (fahrenheit) and, although they never seemed to mind the cold, I brought them inside. However, their copious droppings and banana slinging soon became a problem. I rushed to head-off future Saturdays spent wall-scraping by the timely introduction of bamboo print wallpaper, but the sight of my fruit splattered room soon overwhelmed me. One week of it and I was ready, to find them a new home.

As I continue my research into aviculture, I am inspired by all the unique species that God has created, and am eager to see which will be the next inhabitants to grace my aviary.

*Kara Black lives in Tennessee, USA. It was through the softbill discussion group at Onelist.com that she learnt of the existence of the Avicultural Magazine.*

## BREEDING THE MADAGASCAR TURTLE DOVE

### *Streptopelia picturata*

by Philip Schofield

A chance telephone conversation with a Yorkshire aviculturist in the autumn of 1995, initially about pheasants, produced the information that he had a pair of Madagascar Turtle Doves *Streptopelia picturata* and was tired of their repeated lack of reproductive success. Subsequent negotiations led to their arrival in Dorset, and reception at a friend's aviaries, as I had no room for them. According to their previous owner, the pair, believed to be captive bred, had been imported from Holland. He had kept them in a small aviary in which they laid freely, but never incubated for more than a couple of days. Apparently, they 'fought each other all the time'. On arrival both birds were in rather rough plumage, consistent with their stormy domestic existence.

The pair were installed in an aviary some 13ft (3.9m) square, incorporating an unheated 6ft x 4ft (approx. 1.8m x 1.2m) shed, and enclosed on three sides. The aviary was thinly planted with shrubs and ground cover, with artificial nest sites provided high up undercover outside and in the shed. There was a pond some 4ft (1.2m) in diameter, provided for a pair of Hottentot Teal *Anas hottentota* which shared the aviary. A few small passerines were also present. A mixture of large seeds was provided including safflower, hemp, canary and various millets. Wheat and poultry pellets were provided for the ducks, with cuttlefish, pigeon minerals, grit and sand also on offer. The pair of turtle doves settled down well and were in perfect plumage by late February 1996, when they commenced a pattern that was to continue to the autumn. They would lay their clutch of two eggs and sit well, taking turns on the nest in the normal pigeon fashion, only to lose interest about two days after the second egg had been laid and would repeat the process two or three weeks later.

They always used the same (outside) nest tray, which contained sometimes as many as six eggs in varying stages of freshness. There was always a lot of resistance on the part of the bird that was incubating the eggs, when the other bird wanted to relieve it and take over the incubating duties. This took the form of real fighting, with the birds pecking and wing slapping. No aggression was shown to the other inhabitants.

At the end of 1996, this pair of doves was moved to my aviaries, sharing a compartment 5ft wide x 10ft deep (approx. 1.5m wide x 3m deep) with a single male Grey Peacock Pheasant *Polyplectron bicalcaratum*. The rear half of the aviary was covered on the top and at the sides, forming an open-fronted shelter in which a nest site was placed, screened with conifer

branches. The aviary was not planted, but was felt to give a reasonable degree of seclusion, as the birds could retreat the full length of the aviary away from passers-by. They laid at least seven clutches that season, of which the first two went the same way as those in previous years. Determined to breed this species, I removed the third clutch as the eggs were laid, and entrusted them to a pair of Barbary Doves *S. risoria* dom. The single fertile egg hatched and was reared despite the male Barbary Dove going light and having to be treated (successfully) for trichomoniasis while feeding the young bird, which showed no ill effects. A further seven young Madagascar Turtle Doves were reared in the course of the season, with a second pair of (caged) Barbary Doves sharing the work. The pair of Madagascar Turtle Doves continued to lay eggs and fight their way to their customary untidy and battered appearance by the end of the summer. All the damage was caused by marital strife; there was no suggestion of injury from any other source. These were a very steady pair of birds, often remaining on the nest while I removed the eggs for fostering. As in 1996, the same nest site was used all season. All the fertile eggs hatched, nine in all, although one squab died at an early stage. Despite being rather larger than their foster parents, all the young were well reared, even when there were two together.

In August the eight young Madagascar Turtle Doves were released into my largest aviary, 40ft x 15ft (approx. 12m x 4.5m), with a 6ft x 8ft (approx. 1.8m x 2.4m) shed attached. Already in there were a pair of Blue Peafowl *Pavo cristatus*, a few Golden Pheasants *Chrysolophus pictus* and a single Triangular Spotted or Speckled Pigeon *Columba guinea*. All eight settled well as a group, spending much more time on the ground than did their parents in smaller enclosures. At some time one appeared to have a sprained wing, as it could not fly for a couple of weeks, but made a full recovery without being treated. All the young developed a taste for wholemeal bread, which had formed part of the rearing diet fed to them by their foster parents. They quickly displaced the Triangular Spotted Pigeon from his favourite perch, but did not otherwise seem to bother him. However, he was found dead and underweight, suggesting that more serious harassment had occurred. All the young were sold during the course of the autumn as I did not feel I had room to retain any.

March 1998 found the old pair as usual in immaculate plumage, and they replaced their young in the peafowl aviary, which now housed a pair of breeding Zebra Doves *Geopelia striata* as well as the peafowl and pheasants. It was hoped that this larger enclosure might reduce the level of aggression and lead to the pair breeding normally without assistance. However, this was not to be. They chose a nest site high up in the shed, and laid three clutches in succession. Yet again there was no sustained attempt at incubation. As the pair had given me no good reason to leave them where they were and

I wanted to try a pair of European Turtle Doves *S. turtur* in there, the Madagascar Turtle Doves were removed to an adjoining 10ft x 12ft (3m x 3.6m) aviary with similar facilities and shared with a pair of Grey Peacock Pheasants. (The European Turtle Doves, which had not parent reared their chicks for several years, did so in the big aviary in both 1998 and 1999: the female is now 15). Within a week I found the female Madagascar Turtle Dove dead and scalped presumably by her mate as they had been scrapping as usual, although scalp injuries had not been a normal feature. (The pheasants have always been a particularly peaceful pair of birds). As I had little hope of securing another unrelated female, I sent the male to one of the purchasers of the 1997 young birds.

A full description of this species can be found in Goodwin (1967). Perhaps a little larger and more heavily built than the familiar Collared Dove *S. decaocto*, it has a proportionately shorter tail, recalling a Mountain Witch Dove *Geotrygon versicolor* in both shape and colour. The former, while lacking the iridescence of the Mountain Witch Dove, is coloured in shades of purplish brown, with some faint spotting at the back of the neck. In the wild state it is endemic to Madagascar and neighbouring islands with two subspecies. It has been introduced to Mauritius and was seen there by Baverstock and Morrad (1998). There is no suggestion that it is in any danger of extinction.

It would be interesting to solve the pair compatibility issue with this very attractive bird, which shows more personality than some doves. No aggression was ever seen by the adult pair towards any other bird large or small, although they were never enclosed with other doves of their own size, this would probably have been disastrous, as was demonstrated by the fate of the Triangular Spotted or Speckled Pigeon mentioned earlier. The much smaller Zebra Doves apparently were not seen as competition and were ignored.

Newman (1908) bred this species (with the young apparently being parent reared). Alderson (1911) refers to a second successful breeder, and gives her usual detailed notes about her own pair. She refers to them having deserted a succession of clutches, but having a well-grown young one in the nest at the time of writing, also of being fearless in defending their nest against human intrusion. She mentioned a distraction display, unusual in doves, and a further indication that the present species is worthy of detailed study. While most of the photographs in Miss Alderson's charming book show mixed species groups, her Madagascar Turtle Doves, significantly perhaps, are depicted on their own.

London Zoo, a very successful early breeder of doves, had Madagascar Turtle Doves in the 1860s but these do not appear to have reproduced themselves. The *Foreign Bird Federation Breeding Register* (and before

this the *Avicultural Society Breeding Register*) failed to record any breedings of this dove from 1973 to 1997, so it may be that two world wars have intervened since the previous UK success.

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*Philip Schofield who is by profession a social worker, lives in Dorset in south-west England. An Avicultural Society Council Member, earlier this year (Vol. 106, No. 1, pp. 1-9), he wrote about his 30 years keeping pheasants.*

## WINGING IT

Normally found from Mexico to Argentina, the Ruddy Ground Dove *Columbina talpacoti* has in recent years become a rare but fairly regular visitor to the south-west USA. The earliest records were from south Texas, but more recently records have also come from Arizona (*Winging It*, Newsletter of the American Birding Association Inc., Vol. 12, No. 3).

Elsewhere in the USA 'feeder watchers' are being asked to help document the rapid spread of the recently introduced (Eurasian) Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*. Already abundant in many suburban areas of Florida, it is now becoming more common in Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana and Arkansas. It has also been reported from California, Nevada, Illinois and Oklahoma, and one is said to have wintered in North Dakota (*Birdscope*, Vol. 14, No. 1, Winter 2000).

## THE SAN BLAS JAY, A COOPERATIVE BREEDER

by Eric Callaghan

The San Blas Jay *Cissilopha sanblasiana* is widespread along the Pacific coast of northern Mexico, where it occurs in lowland open wooded areas. It measures 27cm-31cm (approx. 10<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>in - 12in) long, the male being slightly larger than the female. The head, upper mantle and underparts are black. The upperparts, including the wings and tail, are blue, which is especially bright when seen in sunshine. The tail is relatively long and graduated at the tip. The legs and feet are yellowish and the bill is black. The iris of the eye is yellow.

This is a social species in the wild living in groups of up to 30 birds and occupying extensive foraging territories. The group may include up to 10 breeding pairs, each of which may half-heartedly defend a small breeding area against other flock members. The pair bond is strong and may be life-long and, while most birds do not breed until three years old, some first-year birds have been known to do so. Normally each nest is attended by a group of about six birds (Goodwin, 1986; Madge and Burn, 1999).

I received a trio, consisting of two males and a female, on March 1st 1998. They had been kept together for more than six years. The size difference between the sexes was obvious and had been confirmed by surgical sexing. Moreover, at the time, the female's tail feathers were broken and were about half their normal length, making instant identification even easier. I was told that they had had eggs in the past, but nothing had come of these. It was obvious that there was a pair bond between the female and one of the males, the second male being subordinate. As this species is a cooperative breeder in the wild and there was no history of aggression between the birds, I decided to leave the three together.

On arrival they were released into an aviary approximately 17ft long x 5ft wide x 7ft high (approx. 5.2m long x 1.6m wide x 2.2m high). They were very calm, allowing me to approach until there was just the wire separating us. The back and one side of this aviary are solid and the other side adjoins another aviary, with double wire between the two. Three potential nesting platforms had been installed, these being wire platforms approximately 14in (36cm) square, with some twigs wired to them to provide an anchor for any nesting material. One platform was located at each end and one about half-way along the aviary, all situated at the back. Clear perspex sheeting was attached to the outside of the aviary above each nest site. The aviary was planted with a couple of small shrubs and the floor was covered with bark chippings. It has been difficult to grow plants in the aviary as they tend to destroy most growing plants eventually.

A dry dogfood, soaked in warm water, forms the basis of the birds' diet. In addition to this they received, from time to time, pieces of chicken wing, pieces of laboratory mice and raw minced beef. Small cubes of Cheddar cheese are also very popular. They readily accept chopped pear, tomato, kiwi fruit and banana and once each week half an apple, half an orange and half a pomegranate (when available) are placed on spikes in the aviary. The jays also accept peanuts in the shell and sunflower seeds, both of which provide a degree of entertainment as well as being a part of their diet. Mealworms are thrown into the aviary a couple of times a week and are searched for among the vegetation. During the breeding season the protein level in the diet is increased by using a high protein dogfood and increasing the amount of meat. During the winter, greater amounts of fruit and seeds are offered. The amount of food has always been regulated as, like all corvids, they store excess food. From the beginning both males would carry food and feed the female and she would occasionally feed a piece back to them. At times the males have been seen to feed each other.

### **Breeding**

On March 9th, just over a week after they arrived, the paired male was seen carrying a stick which he subsequently gave to the female. A bundle of birch twigs and some dry grass and moss was put into the aviary and on March 12th all three jays started to carry twigs. Two days later the first male was courting the female. He was standing very tall, parallel to the female, with his lower body feathers fluffed downwards. He then bowed and dropped the wing on that side and partially tilted and spread his tail towards her. He was singing continually throughout, the song being a collection of quiet whistles, churring sounds and clicks that could be heard only from very close-by. The second male was never seen courting the female, although he frequently fed her. On March 19th the first male was arranging twigs on the platform on the left of the aviary, and forming the rough outline of the nest. Four days later the pair started to line the nest cup with dry grass. A long piece was selected and taken to a perch where it was bent back on itself many times, the bird using a foot to hold the grass in place, until a bundle was formed that was then taken to the nest. No other material was used and the nest was apparently complete by March 25th.

At mid-day March 29th I was fortunate to be present when the pair mated. The female was standing on a high perch, with her tail quivering. The male approached slowly by a circuitous route, hopping from branch to branch and on and off the back of the aviary. The female suddenly spread her wings and held them horizontally, quivering them strongly and the male then mounted her. Afterwards they sat quietly together on the perch. The second male remained at the far end of the aviary throughout this. The



**San Blas Jay**

*Eric Callaghan*

female had been sitting on the nest that morning and was sitting again at 3.00pm. She was on the nest throughout the following day and the day after

that I found the male sitting beside her on the nest. That day, for the first time, the male began to become aggressive towards me, flying onto the wire when I approached and attempting to peck me, behaviour that became very familiar. Neither the female nor the second male has ever shown any aggression towards me. Both males were now filling their throat pouches and feeding the female on the nest. At this time she was very interested in lumps of cuttlefish 'bone' and broke off pieces and swallowed them. The male also fed pieces to the female.

On April 12th I borrowed a small closed-circuit video camera and placed it on the aviary roof just above the nest. Although both males called in alarm, the female remained on the nest throughout. With the camera in position I was later able to watch the breeding male sit in the nest when the female left to bathe and exercise. The use of the camera provided some interesting details I could not possibly have observed otherwise, e.g. by using the camera I realised that the male crouched down in the nest rather than actually sat on the eggs.

On the afternoon of April 15th the male was extremely aggressive towards me leading me to wonder if the eggs had hatched. Two days later the female was seen to stand up in the nest and apparently pass food to something beneath her. The second male was seen to fill his throat with mealworms and then take a snail shell and break off pieces, later giving the lot to the female. By April 25th it was obvious that something was wrong, as the female was simply continuing to sit on the nest all day without any extra feeding being observed. The following day a broken egg was found in the bath and when the nest was checked two eggs were present. In contrast to earlier occasions, the female readily left the nest when it was approached. Both these eggs were infertile and the nest was abandoned. The eggs were strikingly beautiful, being pinkish buff, mottled with darker rufous spots and blotches. The egg that was measured was 28.4mm x 22.3mm.

Three days later the breeding male was seen giving a stick to the female and later they were seen adding sticks to both of the other nest sites. On May 1st a new nest was under construction at the centre site and for the first time the female was heard singing. On May 6th there was an egg in the new nest and the male was again very aggressive towards me. I moved the camera to above the new nest and the birds were not too disturbed by my doing this. Incubation apparently began the following day and on May 15th I could see there were five eggs in the nest. Six days later I was watching by means of the camera when the male was 'guarding' the nest while the female was off exercising. When the female returned, the male started to vibrate his wings as she approached and the female fed him before settling back onto the eggs. The male then departed.

On May 24th I decided to check the eggs, as I was afraid that they would again turn out to be infertile. When I entered the aviary the female left the

nest and all three birds scolded me from the far end of the aviary, but did not approach me. As the shells were too pigmented to make candling possible I floated the eggs in warm water. Three of the five definitely moved, so this time I knew I had a fertile clutch of eggs. One of the other eggs was damaged and was removed. The female returned to the nest as soon as I left the aviary.

Using the camera the next morning I was able to see that all four eggs were still present. When I next checked at 1.30pm, one chick had hatched. The male kept trying to feed the chick, but was continually intercepted by the female which took the food from him. At 5.00pm I could see that a second chick had hatched and a third egg had split almost in half. The female kept rising in the nest and gently touching the hatching egg and breaking off and swallowing small fragments of shell. At 6.05pm the chick struggled free and the female promptly ate the shell, thus explaining the absence of eggshells in the aviary.

The following morning the male was feeding the young without interference from the female. If a chick did not beg spontaneously the parent encouraged it to do so by putting the tip of its bill just beneath the chick's chin, raising its head. This always caused the chick to gape. At this point the male was spending much time sitting on the side of the nest beside the female, which rarely left the nest. The male was feeding the chicks soaked dogfood as well as livefood. At this time the adults would not feed mealworms to the young, preferring instead to give them waxmoth larvae. Small pieces torn from pinkie mice were also fed to the young.

The youngest chick was missing from the nest on the morning of May 28th, the third day after hatching. At 2.00pm on the same day the female was seen removing the unhatched fourth egg from the nest. This was found to contain a dead, fully-formed chick. It was May 31st, when the young were six days old, before I saw the second male bring food to the nest, although he had probably been doing so earlier. The difference between the two males' feeding methods was very noticeable. The breeding male, the father of the young, always tried to feed the young itself, actively attempting to avoid giving the food to the female, whereas the other male showed no interest at all in the young, instead always giving the food to the female, which then passed some of it to the chicks.

As everything seemed to be progressing well, I was surprised to discover the younger of the two chicks dead in the nest on the morning of June 4th. Later that day the female removed it from the nest and I was surprised to see how large it was. I believe it simply failed to compete for food with the other chick. It made me aware of one of the disadvantages of using the camera for observation. The size of the image on the monitor had led me to believe that the chicks were smaller than they really were and, as a result, I

*Eric Callaghan*

**Young San Blas Jay on the day it left the nest**

had failed to provide the amount of extra food that was required.

On June 5th feather tracts were visible down the spine of the remaining chick and by June 7th the tips of the flight feathers were also visible. By that time the eyes were definitely open. The female jay was first seen to collect food on June 11th which was the first time that the chick was left unattended for even a brief moment. It was now 18 days old. On one occasion when the female returned to the nest and the chick failed to gape, having in her absence been fed by the male, she resorted to lifting the chick's head, as was the practise when the chicks were newly-hatched.

At 3.15pm on June 14th the young jay climbed out onto the rim of the nest for the first time. It was then three weeks old. The female immediately squatted down in the vacated nest. This allowed me the first good view of the chick, which was basically a greyish-brown colour, with very dull blue wings. The head was still covered with pin-feathers, and some of the flight feathers were still in their sheaths as were all the 1/2in (13mm) long tail feathers. The beak was flesh-coloured and the legs and feet were greyish-

pink. The iris of the eyes was dark. There was the suggestion of a small frontal crest, the pin-feathers there being somewhat longer. The chick had returned to the nest by 4.00pm. The next day the chick was sitting on a branch beside the nest and the following day left the nest area completely, and sat on a branch lower down the aviary.

The young bird continued to develop uneventfully and by June 30th was able to fly the length of the aviary. By then its tail was two-thirds adult length. The juvenile was still being fed occasionally on July 15th, even though it had been self-supporting for some time before this.

On July 3rd the adult breeding pair started to vigorously chase the second male in an attempt to drive it away. They settled down again a short time later, but this was the beginning of the expulsion of the second male. The following autumn the persecution got worse and there were times when I found the second male pinned to the ground on its back, with both other adults attacking it. The juvenile took no part in this. Eventually the second male had to be removed from the group.

That autumn the young bird completed a body moult, after which it resembled the adults, except that it had a striking vertical frontal crest. The bill remained pale and darkened at the tip only, and the iris of the eyes was still dark. At the time of writing (April, 2000), the young jay is almost two years old, and the crest is now very much reduced, although still more evident than is the case with the adults, the bill is black and the iris of the eyes is brownish.

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*Eric Callaghan was recently awarded the Society's medal for the first breeding of the Bearded Barbet Lybius dubius in Great Britain or Ireland (Avicultural Magazine 105,2:49-53). He is attached to the Department of Zoology, University College Dublin, Belfield, Dublin 4, Ireland. E-mail:Eric.Callaghan@ucd.ie.*

## FURTHER NOTES ON THE DRAKENSBERG SISKIN *Serinus totta symonsi*

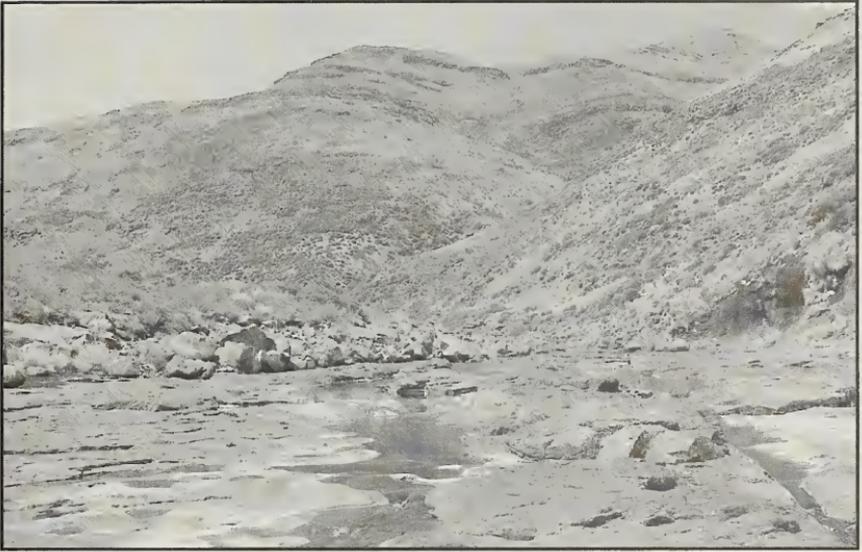
by Neville Brickell and Trevor Konigkramer

In 1986, at the time that my (N.B's) first notes about this species were published (*Avicultural Magazine* 92,1: 37-39), although the clutch size was known successful captive breeding had yet to be recorded. This remains the case but hopefully not for very much longer, as a serious attempt to successfully breed this species is presently underway here in South Africa.

After four months housed in an aviary approximately one-third the size of a tennis court, a pair began to show an interest in breeding. An approximately one-third open-fronted nest-box measuring 12cm x 16cm x 14cm (approx. 4<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>in x 6<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>in x 5<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>in) was visited by the pair for a week before they were first observed carrying nesting material. They preferred mostly coir in preference to the various grasses which were provided. When the nest was completed, the top was level with the lip of the front of the box, enabling the sitting female to have a clear view out. Two eggs were laid and incubated by the female for 17 days. The nestlings had reddish-pink skin with creamy coloured fluff on their heads. Both nestlings disappeared within two days. The culprit was possibly a gecko of an alien species which in recent years has invaded homes and other buildings in coastal towns and cities, having driven out the indigenous Striped Skink *Mabuya striata*, whose diet was solely insects and other small invertebrates.

Also, there was only sparse information on this species' food. Recently the Avicultural Research Unit undertook a survey of the food preferences of captive birds. It was found that they showed little interest in mound termites but alate termites were consumed when in flight. Plant material which had previously been collected from wasteland in all provinces of South Africa and presently growing in my (N.B's) weed and seed garden was offered to 16 birds housed in my (T.K's) aviaries. The plant species, the buds or seeds of which were eaten, were:-

- Dwarf Marigold *Schkuhria pinnata*
- Common Dandelion *Taraxacum officinale*
- Sowthistle *Sonchus oleraceus*
- Gallant Soldier *Galinsoga parviflora*
- Shepherd's Purse *Capsella bursa-pastoris*
- Cape Wild Mustard *Sisymbrium capensis*
- Chickweed *Stellaria media*
- Yellow Sorrel *Oxalis pes-caprae*
- Yellow Nutsedge *Cyperus esculentus*
- Marsh Grass *Echinochloa colona*



**Khatse River in Lesotho**



*Neville Brickell*  
**Nest of Drakensberg Siskin**



*Neville Brickell*  
**Top view of nest**



Neville Brickell

**Male Drakensberg Siskin**

Barnyard Grass *Echinochloa crus-galli*

Sweet Buffalo Grass *Panicum schinzii*

Guinea Grass *Panicum maximum*

Natal Red-top *Rhynchelytrum repens*

Scarlet Salvia *Salvia splendens* bushes growing in the aviary also had their buds attacked by the birds.

Plants previously recorded are omitted from the above list. No household greenfood was offered during the survey.

I (T.K.) discovered four nest sites in Lesotho on February 19th, 2000. One of these was on the horizontal branch of a bush identified as Wormwood *Artemisia afra*, which was growing 1m (approx. 3ft 3in) from the water's edge. The nest which had been abandoned consisted of fine dry grass and tendrils, lined with fine grasses and four dried leaves approximately 5cm (2in) in length. The nest which will be donated to the Free State Natural History Museum or the Transvaal Museum, measures 90mm in diameter x 55mm deep on the outside, with the inside (the cup) 58mm in diameter x 35mm deep.

The second nest was also by the Khatse River. It was in a clump of long drooping grass and is clearly visible on the video film shot at the time. When the female left the nest for a short period the opportunity was taken to examine one of the three eggs. It measured 18mm x 13mm and, like the two laid in the aviary, differed little from that described by Mackworth-Praed and Grant (1963), as being: 'white with fine brown speckling and occasional larger spots of brown.' This is at slight variance with Maclean (1993) in



*Neville Brickell*

**Female Drakensberg Siskin**

which they are described as: 'white to pale greenish blue, sparingly spotted with brown and grey mainly at the thick end'. The other two nest sites were in holes in a bank devoid of any vegetation, holes that had possibly been discarded by bee-eaters or kingfishers. The females were entering and leaving these while the males launched aerial attacks on rival males venturing too close to the holes.

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**Video**

- Konigkramer, T. 2000. *Nesting Drakensberg Siskins in Lesotho*. Natal Bird Breeder's Society Video Library.

Plant identification by Parks Department (Burman Bush), Municipality Metropolitan Council, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

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## HAND-REARING AN ASIAN GREEN STARLING *Aplonis panayensis*

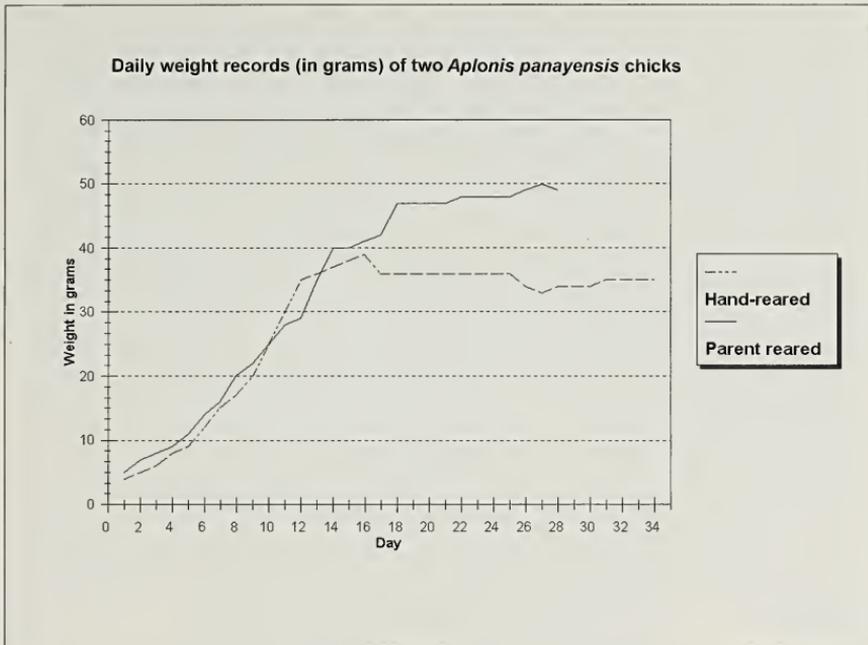
by Juan Cornejo

During the time I was biologist at El Parc de les Aus, a bird garden near Barcelona, Spain, the collection included an adult pair of Asian Green Starlings *Aplonis panayensis*, housed in an outside aviary measuring 2m x 2m x 2.5m high (approx. 6ft 7in x 6ft 7in x 8ft 3in high). The public viewed the birds from the front of the aviary, which had a concrete shelter provided for the birds at the back. A similar aviary on one side housed a group of Black Bulbuls *Hypsipetes madagascariensis*, and a similar aviary on the other side housing a pair of White-headed Bulbuls. Once a day the starlings were provided with universal mix and large pieces of seasonal fruits such as apple, pear, orange and water melon, etc., as well as fresh water in a bowl on the floor.

During the previous two years the starlings' breeding attempts had ended in failure with the eggs or newly hatched chicks being abandoned. May 1998, the pair started to build in a wooden nest-box measuring 10cm x 10cm x 15cm high (approx. 4in x 4in x 6in high), with the top 5cm (2in) open at the front, and eventually filled the bottom with green leaves from the trees in the aviary. On May 13th, during a periodic check, two eggs were found in the box. They were glossy blue with a greenish cast and garnet blotches around the wider end. On the 24th, a chick hatched after an estimated incubation period of 11-14 days. The second egg was found to be infertile.

Because of the history of the pair, the day after the chick hatched it was removed for hand-rearing. It had a little grey down on the back and head, a yellowish bill, and weighed 5g. It was placed in a tissue-lined container in a portable brooder. The temperature was set at 35°C (95°F) and a small container with moistened cotton wool used to maintain the humidity at about 60%. A hand feeding formula was designed made up of 25% fruit (banana, apple and papaya), 50% soaked kitten pellets and 25% hard-boiled egg, mixed together and moistened with warm water as necessary according to the age of the chick. A syringe was used to feed the chick every hour from 6.00am to 12.00pm for the first two days, and every hour from 7.00am to 10.00pm from the third day to the eighth day when we started to supplement the diet with earthworms and newly moulted mealworms. From the eighth day to the 18th day it was fed every two hours from 7.00am to 9.00pm. The chick was weighed every day before the first feed and its weight gains are plotted on the accompanying graph (p. 123)

At four days old, and maintaining a visible amount of yolk sac, the chick's ears opened and it started to lift its head when begging for food; one day



later its eyes started to open. The pin-feathers on the wings and those of the tail started to appear at eight days old, followed one day later by those on the chest. At this time the temperature in the brooder was reduced to 32°C (89.6°F). At 10 days old the chick's eyes were completely open and the upper mandible had begun to turn darker. The chick was really active, and shook its head when begging for food. When the chick was 14 days old, all the major feather tracts had feathered up and the legs, feet and claws were grey. The temperature was reduced to 28°C (82.4°F). The chick started to peck at food held in the fingers and jumped out of the brooder. So, during the warmest hours of the day it was placed on a perch and sections of apple, pear and orange, and soaked pellets were placed in front of it to encourage it to feed itself.

At 17 days old, it was provided with food and placed outside in a small cage during the day. It was capable of scratching itself, as well as cleaning its beak against the perch. It had dark grey feathers on the wings, back and tail, and the underparts from the throat to the under tail-coverts were white with dark spotting. The iris of the eyes was brown orange and the claws were grey.

It began to feed on its own, pecking from a cut section of apple, at 19 days old, and from that time was hand-fed only twice a day to encourage it to fledge. It flew for the first time at 24 days old, when I was taking it for a ride around the park perched on one of my shoulders. From that day it was



*Juan Cornejo*

**Egg and newly hatched chick in nest**



*Juan Cornejo*

**Chick at 18 days old**



*Juan Cornejo*

**Hand-reared bird at 35 days old**

placed in a mixed aviary but continued to come to be fed. Two weeks later it became totally independent and lost its tameness. By that time its beak was almost black and the iris of the eyes had begun to turn red around the outside, the wings and tail feathers had completed their development and the first signs of glossy plumage appeared on the back.

The adult pair laid again on June 1st, but the eggs disappeared. They later laid a third clutch from which one chick hatched on August 1st. With the addition of mealworms to the diet, it was reared successfully by the parents. As can be seen from the accompanying graph (p. 123) from the 14th day it started to gain more weight than the hand-reared chick had.

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## BREEDING THE LESSER FLAMINGO

### *Phoeniconaias minor*

by Mark Rubery

Hillside Bird Oasis obtained its first Lesser Flamingos *Phoeniconaias minor*, eight birds in all, in 1987. In the few weeks run up to their arrival, a wintering house was built and the pool redesigned to suit their requirements. Lesser Flamingos being the most delicate of the six species of flamingos and easily chilled, it was most important they had an easily accessible house in which they could shelter from the weather as and when required.

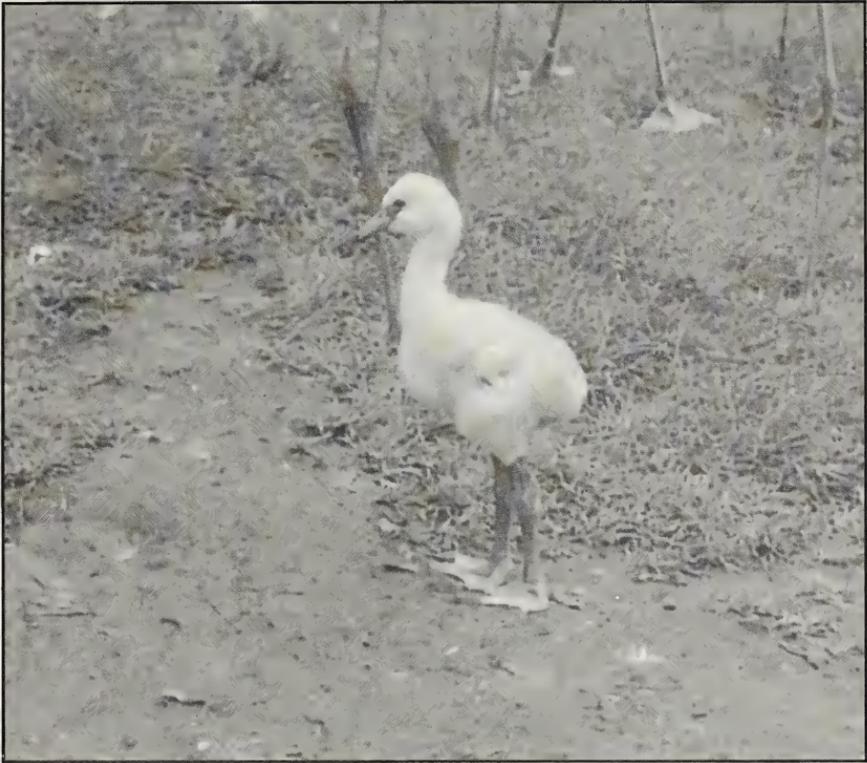
The eight birds arrived safely and settled in well with no real problems. During their first winter they stayed in their house coming out only occasionally. After wintering well and going through a successful moult they all looked in fine feather, and later that year we managed to obtain another 10 birds so that we now had a nice flock. Over the summer I began to notice some slight pair bonding with occasional signs of displaying.

Through the summers of 1995 and 1996 the flock messed about building nests along the water's edge and eventually built some substantial nest mounds on which they sat for many hours. However, no eggs were laid. So, in spring 1997, I moved the flock to the Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus ruber roseus* enclosure, in the hope that their nesting behaviour would stimulate the Lesser Flamingos. Although at first they showed interest in the nesting area used by the large flock of Greater and Chilean Flamingos *P. chilensis*, once nesting commenced they felt intimidated by the larger birds, and stayed near to the water away from the nesting areas. So in the autumn of that year I moved the flock back into its own enclosure.

In 1997 the flock again built nests by the water's edge but, after a while, lost interest. To try to encourage them I put a Chinese Goose egg on one of the mounds. One pair took turns to incubate the egg until eventually they deserted it after about two weeks. However, towards late summer, much to my delight, we had our first Lesser Flamingo egg. It was laid on the grass, so we artificially incubated it, but it turned out to be infertile. At least though, we had made a start.

Lesser Flamingos have only rarely been bred in captivity. So on a visit to East Berlin Zoo in the winter of 1997, I was keen to see how it had achieved success with its Lesser Flamingos. Its flamingos had in fact built nest mounds in their wintering quarters, where they had laid and successfully reared a chick.

I returned home excited at the prospect of trying out placing a nesting area in their winter house. In it I built eight nest mounds. Almost immediately there was a high level of activity, with all mounds soon occupied,

*Mark Rubery***Lesser Flamingo chick at three weeks old**

accompanied by a great deal of displaying outside, and with lots of courtship behaviour taking place in the enclosure. I also observed several pairs mating, which I had not seen before. Then in January seven pairs settled on their nest mounds and laid. Unfortunately, all the eggs were infertile.

In the summer of 1998 many of the birds displayed and pair bonding continued, with nine pairs becoming established. Then, in February 1999, three pairs laid. I was slightly disappointed that it was only three pairs, but at the beginning of March a female stood up and there was a chick. The other two eggs failed to hatch. Within days the chick was marching around the inside of the house and at a week old was outside swimming on the pool with its parents amongst the ducks.

In early May two other pairs returned to the house and began building up their nests, so I put some mud in the house and both pairs laid soon afterwards. Incubation was shared between the birds, the male and female taking it in turns. Both these chicks hatched successfully, making it a triple delight for myself. We were very pleased again when earlier this year, we had two eggs from different pairs, having noted that last year's successful

pairs were continuing to feed their chicks occasionally and making no attempt to lay. Of the two eggs laid, one was fertile and the chick hatched early in June, following the same pattern as last year.

All four are now part of our flock of Lesser Flamingos and can be seen at Hillside Bird Oasis.

*Mark Rubery is owner of Hillside Bird Oasis, Damson Lane, Mobberley, Cheshire WA16 7HY, England. Tel/Fax:01565 873282.*

As described above, the Lesser Flamingo *Phoeniconaias minor*, has been bred at Hillside Bird Oasis. This is probably the first successful breeding of this species in Great Britain or Ireland. Anyone who knows of a previous breeding is asked to inform the Hon. Secretary.

### **SOCIAL MEETINGS 2001**

The Society is trying to arrange a return visit to the Bird Department of the Natural History Museum at Tring. If it can be arranged, the visit will be in January or February, and the booking form will be sent out with the next magazine.

The Society hopes to visit Chester Zoo on March 25th, but this date has yet to be confirmed. The provisional date for the President's Garden Party is July 16th.

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### **AVICULTURAL MAGAZINE BACK ISSUES**

A large stock is available including some early issues. Sales are by post only. Further details are available from:- Hon. Secretary, Avicultural Society, c/o Bristol Zoological Gardens, Clifton, Bristol BS8 3HA, England.

## BOOK REVIEWS

### MANAGEMENT OF LAUGHING THRUSHES IN CAPTIVITY

The laughing thrushes of the genus *Garrulax* are among the most attractive and interesting of the softbills available to aviculture. They are popular and easy to maintain, and there have been many breeding successes, but very few species can be said to have well-established captive populations. In the light of threats to wild populations of a number of species it is important to have a publication which draws together the experiences of those who have been successful with these birds to help promote more consistent success in the future.

Dave Coles is ideally placed to do this, having built up a large collection of *Garrulax* as Curator of Beale Bird Park, and been successful in breeding a number of species. This practical experience, combined with a review of published literature and a wide range of contacts among both amateur and professional aviculturists, has enabled him to summarize effectively the experience gained in many collections where these birds have been maintained and bred successfully.

Twenty-three of the 45 pages (A4 clip bound) consist of sections on accommodation, health, dietary requirements, sociability, breeding, handling and population management, all of which are packed with practically useful, experience-based information. There are also lists of references and of old generic names to aid further research, and a checklist which is annotated to indicate those species recently represented in captivity in the UK, those present in the skin collection at the Natural History Museum, and a full list of common names. These are all useful aids to identification in a genus with 51 species and numerous subspecies, particularly when new species are frequently imported - I know of at least one (the Black Laughing Thrush *G. lugubris*) since lists in this book were finalized at the end of 1999.

There are appendices listing first breeding records in the UK, suggested ring sizes, numbers recorded in 14 annual UK censuses and the 19 species currently thought to be of conservation concern. There is inevitably a bias towards the UK in some of the details, but the sections on captive management are international in their content and application.

The book will be updated as new information becomes available by the publication of separate supplements, a system which Dave already uses with his *First Breeding Records*.

All of this adds up to a publication that *Garrulax* keepers should not be without. I wish the book had been better edited but readers should not let this distract them from the wealth of information presented in this slim

volume, which is available price £7.50 including postage in the UK and £9.00 overseas, from the author at:- 2 Church Farm Cottages, Lower Basildon, Berkshire RG8 9NJ, England.

**Nigel Hewston**

## **PARROT ACTION PLAN**

Action Plans are published by the Species Survival Commission (part of IUCN) and focus on groups of animals of conservation concern. Attempts in the early and mid-1990s to produce one for this large group of birds did not come to fruition. Then in 1995 the World Parrot Trust offered to host a meeting with the aim of launching a plan. Five years later, the Parrot Action Plan has been published, under the title of *Status Survey and Conservation Action Plan 2000-2004, Parrots*.

Trying to co-ordinate experts and field researchers in every part of the range of parrot species was a project which had already failed twice. Because of its importance for the long-term survival of many species and to all those worldwide who work for parrot conservation, the trust was determined that this time it would succeed. The result is a 180-page book which will act as the reference on endangered parrots for some years to come.

Twenty-eight percent, or 95 of the approximately 330 known species, are threatened with extinction. This is one of the highest rates for any major bird family. The plan identifies all the species at risk and describes the reasons. The Introduction makes it clear that: 'The major goal of this Action Plan is to ensure the conservation of the world's parrot species. This is to be achieved by providing researchers, managers, and local groups with practical recommendations for conducting conservation programs for the threatened parrot species and populations endemic to their regions of the world'.

It is founded on the most up-to-date assessments of distribution, status and threats to endangered species, and relates these data to the considerable experience that conservation biologists have gained in attempting to prevent threatened populations from becoming extinct. Perhaps it is fortuitous that the original plan failed, because even in the few years since its inception, much more information on parrot biology and the status of various species has been gained. It is recommended that for enhanced understanding, the present plan should be read in conjunction with more general treatments of parrot conservation and biology.

Destruction and fragmentation of habitat are the main reasons why 78 species are endangered; excessive trade has given this status to 36 more species. Regrettably, in recent years, diminished international trade has been dwarfed by a significant growth in internal trade. For many species,

the two threats act concurrently, so that it is difficult to determine which threat is the most severe. Many aviculturists can recall the flux of 'new' parrot species which entered aviculture during the late 1970s and 1980s, largely the result of new areas being opened up to trappers by felling.

The status of so many parrot species has changed dramatically for the worse since then. Twenty years ago, how many members could have foreseen that species as common as, for example, the Citron- and Sulphur-crested Cockatoos, would now be endangered, mainly as a result of excessive trapping? It is a myth, too, that aviculturists can breed such species and return them to the wild, as the danger of introducing disease from released birds which have been in captivity, is now well known. It may ultimately result in the extinction of the Cape Parrot in South Africa, for example, as the virus which causes Psittacine Beak and Feather disease is now affecting wild birds whose numbers are in the region of only 500 individuals.

The 23-page chapter on General Principles for Parrot Conservation is, in itself, a valuable document for conservation managers. It starts off by pointing out that the over-riding goal of parrot conservation should be the maintenance of viable wild populations within their native ranges and natural ecosystems. Captive populations are not an end-point of conservation efforts. In extreme cases it might be necessary to depend on an intermediate stage in captivity to achieve viable populations. However, the difficulties of establishing wild populations from captive birds are many, for species such as parrots in which important behavioural characteristics are learned and can be quickly modified or lost under captive conditions.

A major problem in conserving parrots is identifying which species are declining. Because they are such highly mobile birds, monitoring population sizes is difficult and usually expensive in terms of man-power. One of the first species to be the subject of an intensive conservation programme was the St Lucia Parrot *Amazona versicolor*. The cause of its decline was mainly hunting. Massive education and legal efforts (mainly master-minded by Paul Butler, who can fairly be described as an icon in the world of parrot conservation) reversed the fortunes of this large and handsome parrot in less than a couple of decades. His work must have inspired many of those now working in the field, all of whom will find the Parrot Action Plan an indispensable document.

Conservation actions vary greatly in cost. For some years captive breeding of the Lesser Antillean Amazons, such as the St Lucia, was proposed as an important aspect. The Action Plan points out that it is relatively expensive; habitat protection and law enforcement have been found to be much less costly. I would add to the argument against captive breeding on the grounds that it will never succeed without the most dedicated personnel. Such people are hard to find and, their commitment, long-term, is usually in

question. Examples are rare; one is Carl Jones with the Mauritius Parrakeet. Habitat protection is important also because there are major benefits for other species which share that habitat. This chapter (p.12) contains the statement that: 'Many parrot species are, in fact, relatively tolerant of habitat degradation *per se*, and can persist in highly modified habitats if stress factors such as trade, hunting, and loss of specialised nest sites can be controlled'. This could be misleading. It perhaps fails to take into account that parrots are extremely long-lived birds. They might exist in altered habitats, but can they survive and breed over the long term? For many species, the answer will surely be a negative one.

The Action Plan's authors and editors, Noel Snyder, Philip McGowan, James Gilardi and Alejandro Grajal, rightly point out that parrots are among the most charismatic species to be found in many ecosystems under threat, and they can serve as a successful focus for habitat protection for many of the less charismatic species. The Puerto Rican Parrot *Amazona vittata*, for example, was crucial in preventing the cutting of rainforest, thereby providing protection for numerous other animals and plants.

The authors mention CITES. Although this convention has curbed illegal international trade in some species, in others CITES listing might even have exacerbated the trade problem, they say.

The section on Captive Breeding will be of interest to most members. The difficulties and problems are described. The conclusion is that because of its risks and limitations, it should be invoked as a species recovery approach only under carefully defined circumstances. These include:-

1. Species approaching extinction so rapidly that they cannot survive without intensive intervention, and other alternatives are not available.
2. All or nearly all members of the species are already in captivity.
3. Other conditions prevail that make captive breeding and re-introduction essential for the preservation of the species in the wild.

In Chapter 3 there is a valuable table listing all threatened species, their distribution area and threat category. The following four chapters cover each region of the world - Australia and the Pacific, Asia, Africa and the Neotropics. Each opens with an honest overview of the area. In that for Indonesia we find: 'In general, the Indonesian conservation community views parrots either as a non-issue or a specialist and thankless conservation activity that runs the risk of embroiling an agency in politics. Opportunities for outside agencies and individuals to make a useful contribution in Indonesia without a strong local partner are limited.'

Indonesia is one of the regions of greatest concern for parrot conservationists. It has a wealth of fascinating and unusual species, and rampant deforestation, habitat loss by fire, and trade which is largely uncontrolled along with unenforced regulations. Except for the efforts of a

few dedicated individuals it is perhaps the most neglected area where parrot conservation is concerned.

The species accounts (most of which are illustrated with a black and white photograph and all with a distribution map) occupy the major part of this book. Each species is discussed under the headings of Conservation status, Distribution and status, Threats and Action. The final 30 pages contain References, contact details for the persons and organisations who contributed information, IUCN Red List Categories and a list of other Action Plans published to date.

No one who is seriously interested in parrot conservation or breeders who want to be well informed about the status of the species in their care, can afford to be without this important document. It can be obtained from IUCN Publications Services Ltd, 219c Huntingdon Road, Cambridge, CB3 0DL. (Tel:- 01223 277894). The price is £15 plus £2.25 postage in the UK, £3 for overseas surface mail, £4.50 for airmail in Europe and £6 for airmail to the rest of the world.

**Rosemary Low**

## **THE LOVING CARE OF PET PARROTS**

*The Loving Care of Pet Parrots* by world renowned parrot expert Rosemary Low is, as signalled by its title, clearly aimed at the pet parrot keeper and at improving the welfare of pet parrots.

Parrot keepers with greater experience need not be put off by the title of this publication. In its 192 pages this paperback includes a wealth and depth of up-to-date information not only on the care and training of pet parrots but also on diet, disease and behavioural enrichment. As we have come to expect from this author the book is extremely well written, benefits greatly from the author's personal experience and is complemented by both colour and black and white photographs.

The first two chapters - Should you be a parrot owner? and Choice of species - include information on the advantages and disadvantages of broad types (e.g large macaws, Australian parrakeets) and individual species of parrots as single pet or companion birds. Cockatiels but not budgerigars are included in this treatment. An interesting treatment in these chapters categorises parrots as to whether they form permanent pair bonds or maintain these only for the duration of the breeding season. Those parrots in the former category make more demanding pets but offer greater rewards in having the potential to bond with their carer.

The following chapters give advice on purchasing parrots, noting the advantages of captive-bred as opposed to wild caught birds and of choosing appropriate housing for pet birds. Many young hand-reared parrots even

when apparently weaned may regress to juvenile behaviour when transferred to a new unfamiliar environment. As such whilst clearly indicating her disapproval of the sale of unweaned birds the author includes a chapter with advice on weaning.

Other topics covered in this volume include health care, wing clipping (with particular reference to its disadvantages), vocal mimicry, plumage care and feather plucking, choice of toys, and the problem of how to recover escaped birds. Throughout the book the welfare of pet parrots clearly remains the author's priority and this book should be compulsory reading for anyone owning a pet parrot or contemplating taking on the responsibilities of parrot ownership.

*The Loving Care of Pet Parrots* is published by Hancock House Publishers, 1431 Harrison Avenue, Blaine, USA. Price \$12.95. In the UK it is available, price £8.95 post free and £10 elsewhere in Europe, from Rosemary Low, PO Box 100, Mansfield, Notts. NG20 9NZ.

**Roger Wilkinson**

## **AFRICAN PARROTS**

*African Parrots* by Rick Jordan and Jean Pattison is dedicated to the American Federation of Aviculture (AFA) to whom the authors have generously agreed to donate their royalties.

This book is written for the parrot hobbyist and appears to be particularly directed to readers in the USA. The introductory chapters on African Parrots and Captive Management Programmes include sections on national restrictions and leg-banding with particular reference to parrot keeping in the USA.

The following eight chapters are devoted to the accounts for selected species of African parrots. *African Parrots* in its 142 pages covers most of those species presently known in aviculture which originate from mainland Africa and from Madagascar and includes a colour section illustrating many of these parrots.

*Poicephalus* enthusiasts will be pleased to see four chapters on this genus but may be frustrated that some aspects on general care are scattered amongst these chapters. Niam-niam Parrots are morphologically very similar to the more well known Brown-headed Parrot and although currently treated as a separate species, were previously considered to be a race of the former. The authors include the provocative suggestion that Niam-niam Parrots may not exist but be either naturally occurring hybrids or aberrant Brown-headed Parrots!

Chapters follow on African Grey Parrots, Rose-ringed (Ring-necked)

Parrakeets, lovebirds and then Vasa and Black Parrots. I have a particular interest in *Coracopsis*. The authors note that the appearance of white or non-uniform feathers in captive Vasas may indicate a nutritional deficiency. I would caution that this may also be an indicator of Pbfd. It is also suggested that both species of *Coracopsis* go bald when in breeding condition with the skin on the head then becoming yellow. In our experience of breeding both species at Chester this was true of only the Greater Vasa Parrot and only occurred in the female.

The final chapters include advice on basic parrot husbandry and breeding, incubation and hand-rearing. These are useful but may have greatest appeal to the more general reader and some of the topics are covered in more detail elsewhere. For example artificial incubation has been covered more comprehensively by Rick Jordan in his earlier book *Parrot Incubation Procedures* (Silvio Mattacchione & Co., 1989) and no mention is made of alternative methods such as tracking weight loss during incubation and moving eggs between drier and more humid incubators to achieve best hatch.

*African Parrots* is published by Hancock House Publishers, 1431 Harrison Avenue, Blaine, WA 98230-5005. It is a paperback priced \$12.95.

**Roger Wilkinson**

Hancock House (Tel: 604-538-1114/Fax: 604-538-2262/E-mail:sales@hancockwildlife.org/Website:www.hancockwildlife.org) has also published a Third (Revised) Edition of *Parrots of the World*. It is priced US\$60.00 plus US\$8.00 s/h in North America and slightly more elsewhere.

## SNIPES OF THE WESTERN PALEARCTIC

By bringing together the existing information, covering the biology and demography of snipes and management techniques for their habitats, this 304-page book by Richard Rouxel represents a serious attempt to compile the existing knowledge of these species with a view to serving as a basis for future research and the development of strategies for their conservation.

*Snipes of the Western Palearctic* is available price FFfr190 from:- Editions Eveil-Nature, 10 rue Evariste Poitevin, 16710 Saint-Yrieix, France (Tel/Fax: (33) 5 45 92 2611/E-mail: eveilnature@hotmail.com), which has published it in conjunction with OMPO, an international non-governmental organisation active in the conservation of migratory birds.

## NEWS & VIEWS

### GURNEY'S PITTA

According to a report in a recent issue of *BBC Wildlife Magazine*, Gurney's Pitta *Pitta gurneyi* may be the first bird species to become extinct this millenium. Fewer than 10 pairs remain in a reserve in southern Thailand, according to the magazine. Earlier this century it was relatively common but destruction of its evergreen forest habitat in Burma and Thailand has seen the population decline at an alarming rate. A breeding pair was located in Thailand's Trang Province in 1986 when some 30 pairs were believed to be present in the reserve with four smaller populations in nearby forests.

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### PARROT APPEAL

It has been confirmed that Harry Sissens has been granted leave to appeal against his conviction for illegally importing into the UK three Lear's Macaws *Anodorhynchus leari* and six Blue-headed Macaws *Ara couloni* (News & Views, Vol. 106, No.2, p.90). The hearing before the Court of Appeal in London is likely to take place at the end of this year or the beginning of next year. Whether or not the appeal succeeds will presumably have a bearing on whether Customs & Excise proceeds with its reported claim against him for £404,000 (approx. US\$600,000), using a law aimed at preventing drug dealers and other criminals from benefiting from their illegal activities. Furthermore, it is seeking to confiscate the rest of the birds that were seized, even though they did not form part of the original case. It seems that the onus is on him to prove that the birds came into his possession legally. The three Lear's Macaws are said to have tested positive for polyomavirus, which is likely to complicate any plans to return them to Brazil and the likelihood of them ever being returned to the wild.

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### LAST POST FOR PIGEONS

Carrier pigeons used by police in the state of Orissa in India are to be made redundant after 21 of them died of heatstroke and neglect. Police chiefs recommended closing the Pigeon Service after more than half a century during which it provided a cheap and effective means of sending messages from villages cut-off by floods and cyclones from the Bay of Bengal. Although the birds were capable of flying 500 miles (approx. 800km) when such natural disasters disrupted land-based radio systems, the 34 policemen assigned to look after them regarded it as a punishment posting in an era of mass communications. First used by Orissa's police in 1946, the birds were trained to fly either long one-way trips, return journeys or to be carried by police officers travelling to remote areas.

## GOODNESS GRACIOUS ME

Of the eight species of vultures that occur in India, most populations have suffered a rapid decline in recent years. To try to determine the reasons for the plummeting vulture populations across India and to formulate an action plan to try to resolve this crisis, Dr Asad Rahmani convened a meeting at the Bombay Natural History Society. Reasons for the worrying decline were thought to include outbreaks of disease, chemical contamination and poisoning. Actions proposed included trapping sick vultures and keeping them under observation, conducting pathological and toxicological examinations, considering captive breeding projects and forming an Indian Vulture Study Group. The latest findings indicate the most likely cause to be infectious disease, with viral aetiology being implicated.

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## DUCKS TACKLE LOCUST PLAGUE

Earlier this year a vast army of domestic ducks and chickens was mobilised in China to tackle the country's biggest plague of locusts in 25 years. The birds were trained to pursue and eat the insects at the sound of a whistle. A spokesman for China's Pest Control Department explained: 'Farmers knew that chickens were very fond of eating locusts so we did some tests with a few hundred birds before spreading the idea more widely. Each bird is said to be able to eat up to 400 locusts per day.'

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## OWENS RAINFOREST AVIARY

The newly remodelled Owens Rainforest Aviary at San Diego Zoo is a spacious walk-through exhibit where water and lush plantings do much to create the atmosphere of a tropical forest. It houses an excellent collection of birds which share parts of their man-made environment with brightly coloured tropical fish, including gouramis, barbs and others, but especially Archer Fish which astonish visitors by demonstrating their skills shooting little jets of water at unsuspecting crickets resting on a rock wall.

Among a number of interesting bird species in the aviary are Greater Racquet-tailed Drongo *Dicrurus paradiseus*, Javan Cochoa *Cochoa azurea*, Green-naped Pheasant Pigeon *Otidiphaps nobilis*, Comb-crested Jaçana *Irediparra gallinacea*, Chestnut-breasted Malcoha *Rhamphococcyx curvirostris erythrognathus*, Blue-masked Leafbird *Chloropsis venusta*, Marché's Fruit Dove *Ptilinopus marchei*, Bartlett's Bleeding Heart Dove *Gallicolumba criniger*, White-breasted Wood Swallow *Artamus leucorhynchus*, Greater Yellow-naped Woodpecker *Picus flavinucha*, Black and Crimson Oriole *Oriolus cruentus* and Ruby-throated Bulbul *Pycnonotus melanicterus*. In all some 180 birds of more than 60 species are exhibited.

### LIST FOR BIRD KEEPERS

Jeremy Taylor, who works as a bird keeper at Disney's Animal Kingdom Orlando, Florida, USA, has created an e-mail list for bird keepers in a zoological setting, as well as other individuals with an involvement in aviculture. Anyone wishing to join may do so by sending a blank e-mail to [birdkeepers-subscribe@egroups.com](mailto:birdkeepers-subscribe@egroups.com) or by going to the list website <http://www.egroups.com/group/birdkeepers>. He points out that this list is an independent undertaking on his own behalf, and is in no way associated with Disney's Animal Kingdom.

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### BOWERBIRD BOOK

Cliff Frith, co-author with Bruce Beehler of *Birds of Paradise* (Oxford University Press, 1998), is now working with his wife, Dawn, on a similar work on the biology of the bowerbirds (Ptilonorhynchidae). They are interested in learning which species are being kept and bred in captivity and other information about this group of birds. Information can be sent to them at:-PO. Box 581, Malanda, Queensland, Australia 4885, or E-mail: [friths@internetnorth.com.au](mailto:friths@internetnorth.com.au).

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### SERIN SURVEY

Bryan Reed and Tony Jolliffe are keen to swap information and possibly birds with others interested in keeping and breeding African *Serinus* species. They are especially interested in making contact with those living outside the UK, and are happy to receive correspondence written in English, German, French, Dutch or Spanish. You should write to:- Bryan Reed and Tony Jolliffe, African Serins Survey, 62 Northwood Drive, Sittingbourne, Kent ME10 4QS, England.

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### AUSTRALIAN AND PARROT FINCH SEMINAR

There will be a one day seminar titled *Captive Breeding and Conservation of Australian and Parrot Finches* held at Bristol Zoo on November 23rd. Organised in collaboration with the Passerine TAG, the programme will include presentations by David Jeggo (Jersey), Nicola Blay (Harewood Bird Gardens), Mark Pilgrim (Chester Zoo), Stewart Evans and Andy Birchenough (Newcastle University) and members of the Australian Finch Society, including Percy Holland (Chairman). It aims to bring together field workers, keepers of Australian and parrot finches, and other aviculturists and zoo staff, and illustrate the potentiality that exists for collaboration between them. Further information is available from Percy Holland (Tel: 01903 872722).

## SPOROPHILA CORRESPONDENT

Jack Clinton Eitniew, of Texas, who was President of the American Avicultural Association, would like to correspond with other keepers of *Sporophila* finches. He can be contacted through the bulletin board on the Avicultural Society website ([www.avisoc.co.uk](http://www.avisoc.co.uk)).

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## UK FIRST

A while ago, Robert Callaghan sent a cutting about the imminent hatching of a Marabou *Leptoptilos crumeniferus* egg at Blackbrook Zoological Park, near Leek, Staffordshire. Now, Zoo Manager, Malcolm Mycock, has sent an account of the breeding two Marabous there in 1998, one of which was reared successfully, and was probably the first breeding of this species in Britain or Ireland. His account will appear in the next issue of the magazine.

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## TEN THOUSAND TOURACOS

The Proceedings of the Ninth Pan-African Ornithological Congress, held in Accra, Ghana, December 1st - 7th 1996, have recently been published in *Ostrich*, Vol. 71, No. 1 & 2, March 2000. Amongst the many papers of interest to aviculturists is one on the status and conservation of Prince Ruspoli's Touraco *Tauraco ruspolii* by Luca Borghesio and Renato Massa (pp. 355-358). Although currently considered endangered, the authors estimate that the present population of this Ethiopian endemic could number 10,000 individuals. These frequent mostly forest margins and relatively dry acacia woodlands, whereas the White-cheeked species *T. leucotis* prefers wetter forests.

\* \* \*

## ELEGANT BREEDING

In April this year Cologne Zoo opened its new tropical house called The Rainforest, in which it has already succeeded in breeding the Elegant Pitta *Pitta elegans*. Other birds living in the house include Vietnamese Pheasant *Lophura hathinensis*, Red-billed Malkoha *Phaenicophaeus javanicus*, Blue-tailed Trogon *Harpactes reinwardti*, Black and Red Broadbill *Cymirhynchus macrorhynchus*, Lesser Bird of Paradise *Paradisaea minor*, Chestnut-capped Laughing Thrush *Garrulax mitratus*, White-collared Myna *Streptocitta albicollis* and Crested Jay *Platylophus galericlulatus*. Theo Pagel's account of breeding the Elegant Pitta will appear in the next issue of the magazine.

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## DOUBLE YOLK

Neville Brickell reports from South Africa that a fellow member of the Natal Bird Breeder's Society, Peter Viljoen, a dove and pigeon breeder for over 30 years, gave members of the society the opportunity to witness an unusual occurrence in his aviaries. A pair of Band-tailed Pigeons *Columba fasciata* laid a single egg which hatched after 19 days and was found to contain two nestlings of equal size. One died three days later but the other was reared to adulthood.

## FURTHER BREEDINGS

In the previous News & Views (Vol.106, No. 2, p. 94) mention was made of some of the species bred during 1999 at San Diego Zoo and San Diego Wild Animal Park. Others included two Eastern Yellow-billed Hornbill *Tockus flavirostris*, two Southern Sulawesi Hornbill *Penelopides exarhatus sanfordi*, two Malaysian Wrinkled Hornbill *Aceros c. corrugatus*, one White-headed Hornbill *A. l. leucocephalus*, one Red-knobbed Hornbill *A. cassidix*, two Eastern Papuan Hornbill *A. plicatus jungei* and three Black Hornbill *Anthracoceros malayanus*. Amongst the smaller species bred were two Guianan White-bearded Manakin *Manacus m. manacus*, two Senegal Gonolek *Laniarius b. barbarus*, one Sichuan White-browed Laughing Thrush *Garrulax sannio oblectans*, three Oriole Warbler *Hypergerus atriceps*, 10 Northern Wing-barred Seedeater *Sporophila a. americana*, five Northern Spotted Tanager *Tangara p. punctata*, five Western Golden-masked Tanager *T. larvata francisciae*, one Surinam Green Honeycreeper *Chlorophanes s. spiza* and 22 Wattled Starling *Creatophora cinerea*.

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## CORNISH ECHOES

As there is now a surplus of male Echo Parrakeets *Psittacula echo* living on Mauritius, six have been sent to be quarantined at Jersey Zoo. Three of these are destined for Paradise Park, Hayle, Cornwall. Among them, 'Pablo', one of the first to be hand-reared, and a remarkably tame individual, which is expected to join Paradise Park's free-flying bird show.

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## END OF THE ROAD

Following the death of Betty Risdon, about a year ago, it was rumoured that The Tropical Bird Gardens, Rode, near Bath, Somerset, would be put up for sale. This has now happened. The story of this popular collection, opened to the public in 1962, and now housing some 1,000 birds of about 200 different species, was described by Betty in her book *The Road to Rode*, reviewed in the *Avicultural Magazine*, Vol. 104, No.4, p.181.

## OBITUARIES

### DR LUIS FELIPE BAPTISTA

Once in a while someone comes along who, though we may meet them only for a fleeting moment, can leave us with a remarkably lasting impression. Such a person was Dr Luis Felipe Baptista who, sadly, died unexpectedly on June 12th, while tending the garden of his home at Sebastopol, California. He was only 59.

Luis' ancestors had lived in the Portuguese colony of Macao since the seventeenth century, but he was born in Hong Kong. After the Second World War the Baptista family left for the USA, a move that could have been inspired because from there Luis' childhood fascination with wildlife was to blossom into a distinguished scientific career.

He studied biology and graduated from the University of San Francisco in 1965 and, in 1971, received his PhD from the University of California, at Berkeley. The following year he was awarded a two-year NATO post-doctoral fellowship to work on behavioural physiology at the Max Planck Institute, near Munich, Germany. During this period he studied Old World mannikins and New World grassquits. Luis went on to become Curator and then Associate Professor at the Moore Laboratory of Zoology at Occidental College, Los Angeles. He left in 1980, upon being invited to join the California Academy of Sciences. In 1987, following the death of his friend and mentor, Dr Robert T. Orr, Luis became Curator, the position he held until his death.

For over 20 years he worked with colleagues studying the songs and calls of White-crowned Sparrows, documenting individual songs of various subspecies and recording dialects of birds from different areas. It is said he knew the languages of songbirds from Alaska to Costa Rica and was a friend to just about every winged creature - some 178 species - in Golden Gate Park. On many occasions he was able to call to the birds and attract them onto his hands, and when he arrived home would give a brief whistle whereupon, from out of the bushes, a flock of wild quail would come out into the open to greet him.

Luis was profoundly interested in conservation and for the past 10 years had worked with Mexican biologists to save Grayson's Dove, which had disappeared from Socorro Island following the introduction of feral cats. He was devoted to a project to breed captive Grayson's Doves for release back onto the island once the predators were removed and the island was restored to its natural state.

Altogether Luis was the author and co-author of over 100 papers on avian systematics, bioacoustics, song dialects and song learning. Only

recently he was working on an unfinished paper with Jack Clinton Eitniew, of Texas, on tropical pigeon vocalizations. He was also one of the few scientists who actively worked alongside aviculturists<sup>1</sup>, forever ready to oblige by giving talks, advice or by providing articles for publication at short notice. When I was Editor of *The Estrildian*, in spite of his pressing commitments and without any prompting from me, he graciously provided the two best articles ever published in the magazine: *Timor/Australian Zebra Finches*, in 1993; and *A Guide to the Study of Estrildids*, in 1995. He was prepared to stop whatever he was doing to answer my telephone calls and was always incredibly jovial and tremendously helpful.

Among his other many accolades, Luis was regarded by many as the foremost authority on waxbills, for he knew almost everything there is to know about them, down to the finest detail. Not a movement, not a call, not the slightest nuance passed him by.

Patrick Kocielek, Executive Director of the California Academy of Sciences, said: 'Luis was a brilliant scientist who made contributions that are fundamental to our understanding of bird communication and vocalization. He was a kind and affable person who was loved and respected by all of the staff at the academy.' To this we could well add: 'and everyone else whose life he touched.'

Ornithology and aviculture have lost an irreplaceable friend.

Dr Luis Felipe Baptista is survived by his daughter Laura; his partner, Helen Horblit; his mother and two brothers. A memorial service was held in San Francisco on June 24th.

**Ian Hinze**

<sup>1</sup> *In the Avicultural Magazine 100, 4:183-188 (1994), he wrote about Aviculture's Contributions to Science and Conservation. Dr Baptista also wrote in the magazine On Courtship Displays and the Taxonomic Position of the Grey-headed Silverbill (79,5:149-154); Field Observations of some New Guinea Mannikins Lonchura spp. (97,2:77-87) and, with Helen M. Horblit, on The Inheritance and Loss of the Straw Display in Estrildid Finches (96,3:141-152).*

## PETER GLADSTONE

The death occurred on July 25th of Peter Gladstone. He was 71. A lifelong waterfowl enthusiast, he devoted time and energy - much of it on a voluntary basis - to establishing the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust's Martin Mere reserve at Burscough in Lancashire. He also kept waterfowl at the family home, Hawarden Castle, North Wales and went on to establish a private collection at Shrewsbury School while he was a biology teacher there.

Through family connections he came to know the late Sir Peter Scott who was enthusiastic about the Martin Mere project. Initially he worked on a voluntary basis to get things up and running and was subsequently appointed its first Curator (1972-1977). Said Pat Wisniewski, Martin Mere's present Manager: 'He was responsible for laying out the original footprint of the grounds and it is a fitting tribute to his foresight and ability that it is, by and large, the same footprint that exists today'.

Peter worked tirelessly to raise not only the vital funds which helped establish the Lancashire centre but also his own salary! His enthusiasm and knowledge played a key part in Martin Mere's early success and he also had the invaluable ability to be able to beg and borrow from all and sundry. He established and maintained a good rapport with the local farming community at a time when the idea of transforming farmland to wetland was regarded as distinctly eccentric.

Some years ago he visited the Falkland Islands to study Ruddy-headed and Magellan Geese. More recently, in 1998, his enthusiasm undiminished, he led an expedition to Tibet on an unsuccessful search for the Pink-headed Duck (see News & Views, Vol. 104, No. 1, p. 41).

**Frank Woolham**

## **PHILLIP GLASIER**

Phillip Glasier has died aged 84. A leading expert on falconry and hawking, he founded the Falconry Centre, now the National Bird of Prey Centre, at Newent, Gloucestershire. Housing the largest collection of birds of prey in the world, it is run now by his daughter Jemima Parry-Jones.

## **JACK BARLASS**

Ken Dolton writes: 'Due to the sad loss of Mr Jack Barlass we have lost our longest member, who had been in the Society since 1934. The member who has now been in the Society for the longest time is Professor Bob Hodges who joined in 1947. This information I obtained from the Avicultural Magazine, Vol. 73, Jan/Feb 1967, at which time there were 1,068 members'.

## **KEN LAWRENCE**

As this magazine goes to press, it is learnt of the sudden death of the Society's Chairman Ken Lawrence on November 1st. A full obituary will appear in the next issue.

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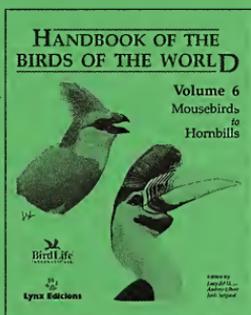


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